



PROMOTING EQUITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION THROUGH THE USE OF AMERICAN LITERATURE

Hawa Krampah

Department of English, College of Southern Nevada, Las Vegas, NV, USA

ABSTRACT

This research article explores the themes of slavery and racism as depicted in two seminal works of American literature: *The Bondman's Narrative* by Hannah Crafts and *The Marrow of Tradition* by Charles W. Chesnutt. By examining both novels, this paper delves into the ways in which each author portrays the economic, social, and psychological implications of slavery and the persistence of racial hierarchies after the Civil War. Through detailed character analysis and a comparative approach, the paper argues that these works reveal significant insights into historical racial oppression and provide a lens through which we can better understand contemporary struggles for racial justice. Drawing connections between these historical texts and modern social issues, this study sheds light on the enduring legacy of systemic racism in American society.

KEYWORDS: Slavery, Racism, American Literature, Racism, Systemic Oppression, Diversity and Inclusion

1. INTRODUCTION

American literature has long served as a great way of examining social injustice, particularly in relation to the history of slavery and its lasting effects on racial dynamics in the United States. Authors like Hannah Crafts and Charles W. Chesnutt, through their works *The Bondman's Narrative* and *The Marrow of Tradition*, respectively, offer compelling narratives that portray the lived experiences of African Americans during periods of extreme racial oppression. Both novels are set in the context of slavery and its aftermath, providing a window into the devastating effects of systemic racism that continues to happen in the present day.

This paper aims to analyze how Crafts and Chesnutt portray slavery and racism, focusing on the economic, social, and personal implications of these themes in their works. Through comparative analysis, this study examines the narratives of key characters like Riah, a former slave in *The Bondman's Narrative*, and Dr. Miller, a Black doctor navigating the post-Civil War South in *The Marrow of Tradition*. Both characters serve as central figures in their respective texts, depicting the struggles for freedom and equality while confronting the persistent structures of racial oppression.

The purpose of this paper is to enhance our understanding of how literature not only reflects historical realities but also serves as a crucial tool for advancing contemporary discussions about racial justice. By examining these two novels, we can gain insights into the various forms of racism, the enduring nature of social hierarchies, and the importance of resistance in the face of oppression.

To fully appreciate the significance of *The Bondman's Narrative* and *The Marrow of Tradition*, it is essential to situate both works within their historical contexts. Slavery in the United States, particularly in the South, was an institution deeply embedded

in economic, social, and legal systems[1]. African Americans slaves suffered from forced labor, were denied basic human rights, and were regarded like property. The consequences of this cruel system persisted in influencing American society even after the Civil War and the formal end of slavery in 1865, not just during the years of slavery[2].

Hannah Crafts is generally known to have written *The Bondman's Narrative* in the middle of the 1850s, capturing the antebellum era, when slavery was at its height in the southern United States [3]. The work of slaves was important to the South's economy during this time, especially in the agricultural sector. The wealth and influence of the southern elite were mostly derived from the cultivation of cotton, tobacco, and other crops by slave workers[4].

Slavery during the antebellum period was marked by its systemic dehumanization of African Americans. Slaves were treated as commodities, bought and sold on markets, and their labor was fully exploited. Families were often torn apart, with mothers, fathers, and children being separated and sent to different plantations[5], [6]. This aspect of slavery is clearly depicted in *The Bondman's Narrative*, where the protagonist Riah faces the constant threat of separation from her loved ones and struggles to retain her humanity in a system designed to strip it away.

The Civil War (1861-1865) was a turning point in the history of slavery in the United States. The war was fought between the Union (the northern states) and the Confederacy (the southern states) primarily over the issue of slavery. The Emancipation Proclamation, issued by President Abraham Lincoln in 1863, declared that all slaves in the Confederate states were to be set free [7]. However, it was not until the Union's victory and the ratification of the 13th Amendment in 1865 that slavery was officially abolished throughout the country. Though the end

of slavery was a significant milestone in the fight for racial equality, it did not signal the end of racial oppression. The years 1865–1877, known as Reconstruction, were a time of great political and social upheaval as the country tried to reconstruct itself after the Civil War[5]. Significant obstacles faced by African Americans in the South included the emergence of white supremacist organizations such as the Ku Klux Klan, the imposition of Black Codes intended to restrict their newly acquired liberties, and pervasive acts of violence intended to uphold the racial status quo.

Charles W. Chesnutt's *The Marrow of Tradition*, published in 1901, is set in the post-Civil War South, a period during which African Americans were subjected to a new form of racial oppression: Jim Crow laws. These laws, enacted in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, institutionalized racial segregation and disenfranchised Black citizens across the South. Despite the formal abolition of slavery, African Americans continued to experience economic exploitation, social marginalization, and violent repression. In *The Marrow of Tradition*, Chesnutt portrays the post-Reconstruction South as a place where the racial hierarchies established during slavery remained firmly in place. African Americans like Dr. Miller, the novel's Black protagonist, faced systemic barriers to social and economic advancement despite their education and professional achievements. The novel reflects the persistence of racism in American society and the ways in which white supremacy adapted to new political and social realities after the Civil War. This paper argues that *The Bondman's Narrative* and *The Marrow of Tradition* serve as pivotal literary texts that uncover the enduring economic, social, and psychological impacts of slavery and systemic racism, offering profound insights into historical oppression and its lasting influence on contemporary racial justice struggles.

2. MATERIALS AND METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach to examine themes of slavery and racism in *The Bondman's Narrative* by Hannah Crafts and *The Marrow of Tradition* by Charles W. Chesnutt. Combining textual analysis with historical contextualization, it explores economic, social, and psychological impacts of slavery and ongoing racial hierarchies. The research involves selecting these seminal works for their portrayal of African American experiences during slavery and systemic racism. Close reading identifies key themes, character developments, and narrative strategies. A comparative analysis highlights parallels and contrasts, focusing on economic exploitation, racial identity, and resistance. Historical contextualization draws on secondary sources to situate the novels within their periods, including the antebellum era, Reconstruction, and Jim Crow laws. Thematic analysis examines systemic oppression and resilience, guided by interdisciplinary insights from literary criticism and history. Findings integrate textual evidence with historical commentary, emphasizing how these narratives illuminate systemic racism's legacy and inform contemporary discussions on racial justice.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Economic Exploitation and Labor

In both *The Bondman's Narrative* and *The Marrow of Tradition*, the economic exploitation of African Americans plays a central role. The harsh working conditions that Riah and other slaves endured in *The Bondman's Narrative* serve as a metaphor for how slavery was an economic system that favored white landowners over Black slaves. Black slaves were made to labor in appalling conditions with little to no consideration for their welfare, the novel emphasizes the toll that this exploitation took on their physical and mental health.

Hannah Crafts' *The Bondman's Narrative* offers a poignant portrayal of the ways in which slavery was inextricably tied to the economic prosperity of the antebellum South. The novel's protagonist, Riah, endures brutal physical labor that epitomizes the dehumanizing conditions of slavery. Crafts not only highlights the forced labor and violence inherent in the system but also exposes how the economic structure of slavery perpetuated the power dynamics between slave masters and the slaves.

Throughout *The Bondman's Narrative*, Crafts carefully constructs scenarios that depict how African Americans slaves were treated inhumanely, and reduced to mere instruments of profit. The novel's descriptions of the plantation system illustrate how slaves were exploited for their labor to produce good, primarily cash crops such as cotton and tobacco, which enriched white landowners and sustained the Southern economy.

The wealth amassed by the plantation-owning class was directly proportional to the suffering of slaves like Riah, whose labor fueled an economic machine built on racial hierarchy and dehumanization. Crafts' narrative invites readers to see how deeply rooted slavery was in the economic systems of the time, emphasizing that the accumulation of wealth for one group came at the expense of the freedom and dignity of another.

In addition, Crafts highlights the various ways the slaves resisted economic exploitation, even within the confines of the oppressive system. Riah's subtle acts of defiance and resilience, her refusal to be entirely broken by the system, demonstrates that even in the face of overwhelming adversity, slaves found ways to assert their humanity and challenge the economic and social structures that sought to dehumanize them.

On the other hand, in Charles W. Chesnutt's *The Marrow of Tradition*, the economic exploitation of African Americans continues, though in new forms, after the formal abolition of slavery. The novel, set in the post-Reconstruction South, portrays a society where racial hierarchies remain intact, despite the legal freedom of Black Americans. Economic exploitation takes on a new guise: sharecropping, low-wage labor, and systemic exclusion from professional opportunities [8].

Dr. William Miller, one of the key characters in *The Marrow of Tradition*, serves as an emblem of Black economic advancement, which is met with intense hostility from white society. Dr. Miller's achievements as a physician and a landowner represent a direct challenge to the social and economic order, as his

success undermines the white supremacist notion that African Americans are inherently inferior and incapable of professional or economic success.

However, Dr. Miller's success is not without significant barriers. Chesnutt paints a picture of a society where racial discrimination limits the ability of Black individuals to accumulate wealth and achieve economic independence. The novel reflects the post-slavery mechanisms of economic exploitation, such as disenfranchisement and discriminatory labor practices, that prevented African Americans from fully participating in the nation's economic life. Even as free citizens, African Americans were systematically marginalized and denied the full fruits of their labor, a phenomenon Chesnutt captures with chilling clarity[9].

The hostility Dr. Miller faces is not limited to "professional jealousy"; it is part of a broader societal effort to maintain white economic dominance. Chesnutt's portrayal of the Wilmington Massacre of 1898, where a white mob overthrew a legally elected biracial government and destroyed the wealth of African Americans, underscores how economic exploitation was maintained through violence and terror[10]. The destruction of African American businesses and the displacement of Black professionals were not isolated incidents but part of a coordinated effort to reassert white supremacy in both the economic and social realms.

Chesnutt's *The Marrow of Tradition* thus becomes a scathing critique of the idea that emancipation brought about economic equality. Instead, it reveals the numerous ways that systemic racism adapted to the post-slavery environment, continuing to exploit Black labor while simultaneously denying African Americans access to the wealth and resources that could enable them to break free from the cycle of poverty [11].

3.2. Racial Identity and Power Dynamics

In *The Bondman's Narrative*, Riah's identity as a Black woman in the antebellum South determines every aspect of her life, from her lack of personal freedom to the treatment she receives from those in power. Crafts uses Riah's story to explore the intersections of race, gender, and class, exposing how racial identity is constructed and manipulated to uphold white supremacy [12].

One of the most striking aspects of the novel is its exploration of "passing," the ability of light-skinned African Americans to present themselves as white. This phenomenon plays a central role in the narrative as Riah grapples with her own racial identity and the ways in which society's rigid racial categories affect her sense of self. The ability to pass as white offers a potential escape from the horrors of slavery, but it also forces Riah to confront the painful reality of a society that values individuals based on skin color rather than their humanity[13].

Crafts' portrayal of racial identity in *The Bondman's Narrative* highlights the arbitrary and socially constructed nature of race. By exploring the fluidity of racial identity, the novel challenges the idea that race is a fixed, biological reality. Instead, it reveals

how racial categories are enforced through violence and coercion to maintain the social and economic order.

3.3. Racial Identity in The Marrow of Tradition

In *The Marrow of Tradition*, Charles W. Chesnutt similarly examines the ways in which racial identity shapes the lives of his characters, though in a post-slavery context. For Dr. Miller, his identity as a Black man in the post-Reconstruction South limits his opportunities despite his education and professional success [14]. Unlike Riah, who must contend with the brutal reality of slavery, Dr. Miller navigates a society that claims to have moved beyond slavery yet continues to enforce racial hierarchies through segregation, disenfranchisement, and violence.

Dr. Miller's experiences reveal the precariousness of Black identity in a society that seeks to strip African Americans of their dignity and humanity [12]. His professional success makes him a target for white supremacist violence, as his achievements are seen as a threat to the racial status quo. Chesnutt uses Dr. Miller's character to highlight the contradictions of the post-Civil War South, where African Americans were legally free but still bound by the invisible chains of systemic racism.

The novel also explores the theme of "racial purity," a concept that was central to the ideology of white supremacy in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The fear of racial mixing, often referred to as "miscegenation", is a driving force behind much of the violence in *The Marrow of Tradition* [15]. Chesnutt's portrayal of this fear reflects the anxieties of a white society desperate to maintain its control over a racially stratified social order.

By juxtaposing the experiences of Black and white characters, Chesnutt exposes the absurdity of racial purity as a concept and critiques the lengths to which society will go to enforce racial boundaries. Through Dr. Miller's struggles, the novel illustrates the deep-rooted racism that continued to shape American society even after the formal end of slavery.

4. CHARACTER ANALYSIS

4.1. Riah in The Bondman's Narrative

Riah, the protagonist of *The Bondman's Narrative*, is a character through whom Crafts articulates the complexities of identity, resistance, and survival in the face of dehumanizing oppression. Riah is an archetype of resilience, embodying both the struggles of slaves and their unyielding will to resist their oppressors. Her experiences offer a window into the gendered aspect of slavery, where Black women were subjected to unique forms of exploitation, including sexual violence, domestic servitude, and physical abuse.

One of the defining aspects of Riah's character is her inner strength and intellectual agency. Despite her external circumstances, Riah maintains a sense of self that defies the institution of slavery's efforts to dehumanize her. Crafts uses Riah's intelligence and resourcefulness to challenge the prevailing stereotypes of Black women as subservient or intellectually inferior. Riah's ability to navigate the complex

social dynamics of the plantation, as well as her determination to escape her circumstances, marks her as a figure of resistance.

Moreover, Riah's relationships with other characters in the novel serve to highlight the intersections of race and class, interactions with white characters, particularly her enslavers, illustrate the power imbalances that defined the lives of Black slaves. However, Riah's relationship with other slaves is equally significant, as it demonstrates the solidarity and community that emerged among those who were oppressed. Crafts' portrayal of these relationships adds depth to Riah's character and emphasizes the importance of collective resistance in the face of systemic oppression.

4.2. Dr. William Miller in the *The Marrow of Tradition*

In the *The Marrow of Tradition*, on the other hand, Dr. William Miller is one of the most compelling figures in Charles W. Chesnutt's *The Marrow of Tradition*. As a Black doctor navigating the turbulent racial politics of the post-Reconstruction South, Dr. Miller's experiences reflect the challenges faced by African Americans who sought to rise above the societal limitations imposed by white supremacy. Through Dr. Miller's character, Chesnutt offers a complex exploration of race, professionalism, and resistance, making him a critical lens through which the novel critiques the broader social structures of the time.

Dr. Miller's character is unique in that he represents an African American man who has managed to achieve economic and professional success despite the systemic barriers that are designed to keep Black citizens oppressed. He is well-educated, well-respected within his own community, and committed to providing medical care for both Black and white patients. His practice is a symbol of what is possible for African Americans when given the opportunity to succeed, and his professionalism serves as a form of resistance against the dominant racial ideologies that seek to relegate Black individuals to subservient roles.

However, Dr. Miller's success also makes him a target for those who wish to maintain the racial hierarchy. His very existence challenges the notion that African Americans are inherently inferior to whites, and this disruption of the social order provokes violent reactions from the white supremacist factions in the town. The novel portrays Dr. Miller as a figure who must constantly navigate a precarious existence, balancing his professional ambitions with the harsh realities of living in a society that refuses to recognize his humanity fully.

One of the most significant tensions in *The Marrow of Tradition* is the contrast between Dr. Miller's success and the ongoing struggles faced by less privileged African Americans. Although Dr. Miller has achieved a level of success that few other Black citizens in the novel enjoy, Chesnutt makes it clear that his achievements do not protect him from the broader forces of racism [15]. The Wilmington Massacre, which forms the climax of the novel, reveals the fragility of Black success in a society where white violence is used to maintain racial order.

Dr. Miller's relationship with the wider Black community is also significant, as it underscores the theme of racial solidarity. Despite his relative privilege, Dr. Miller remains deeply committed to helping his fellow African Americans, using his resources and influence to fight for justice [16]. He is not an isolated figure of success; rather, he understands that his fate is tied to the fate of all Black citizens. Chesnutt uses Dr. Miller's character to critique the idea that individual success is enough to overcome systemic oppression, showing that true progress requires collective action and solidarity.

Dr. Miller's moral compass is central to his character, and Chesnutt uses him to explore the ethical dilemmas that arise in the face of racial violence. One of the novel's most powerful moments occurs when Dr. Miller is faced with the decision of whether or not to treat a white child whose father is one of the leaders of the white supremacist mob. This moment encapsulates the moral complexity of Dr. Miller's position as a Black doctor in a racist society. On one hand, his professional ethics demand that he provide care to anyone in need, regardless of their race or personal beliefs [17]. On the other hand, his decision to treat the child could be seen as a capitulation to the very forces that oppress him and his community.

Chesnutt uses this moral dilemma to highlight the tension between personal ethics and social justice. Dr. Miller's decision to treat the child, despite the hatred he faces from the white community, reflects his deep commitment to the Hippocratic oath and his belief in the humanity of all individuals. However, the novel also suggests that such moral actions are not enough to dismantle the broader structures of racism. Dr. Miller's ethical choices, while noble, do not shield him from the violence and discrimination that define the world around him.

4.3. Resistance to Oppression in *The Bondman's Narrative* and *The Marrow of Tradition*

Resistance is a central theme in both *The Bondman's Narrative* and *The Marrow of Tradition*, manifesting in different forms as the characters struggle against the oppressive forces of slavery and racism. Both novels depict resistance as not only a physical act but also as an intellectual, emotional, and psychological process through which the oppressed assert their humanity and fight for their rights.

In *The Bondman's Narrative*, resistance is primarily depicted through the actions of African American slaves who fight against their dehumanization and subjugation. Riah, the protagonist, embodies both overt and covert forms of resistance. Crafts highlight moments of direct defiance, such as Riah's attempts to escape the plantation, as acts of physical resistance against the brutal system of slavery. These acts of rebellion are dangerous, as the consequences for escape attempts were often severe, ranging from violent punishment to death. However, Crafts emphasizes that the desire for freedom is so strong that slaves are willing to risk everything to break free from their bondage.

Beyond physical escape, *The Bondman's Narrative* also explores more subtle forms of resistance, such as intellectual resistance and emotional resilience. Crafts portrays Riah's

determination to maintain her sense of self-worth in the face of a system designed to strip her of her humanity. Through her literacy, inner thoughts, and personal faith, Riah resists the psychological conditioning that slavery seeks to impose on her. Her refusal to be entirely broken by the institution of slavery is a powerful statement of resistance, one that underscores the idea that the spirit of the Slaves could not be fully crushed.

Chesnutt also explores the idea of collective resistance through the political organizing of African Americans in the face of white supremacist violence. The novel reflects the growing frustration among African Americans with the failure of Reconstruction to deliver on its promises of equality and the emergence of organized efforts to fight for civil rights. This collective resistance is met with violent opposition, as exemplified by the Wilmington Massacre, but it also serves as a precursor to the larger civil rights movements that would emerge in the 20th century.

The novel's depiction of racial solidarity, especially in the face of white mob violence, suggests that resistance is not only a personal act but also a communal one. The African American characters in *The Marrow of Tradition* are united in their struggle for justice, even as they face overwhelming odds. Chesnutt uses this collective resistance to critique the social structures that allow for such violence to occur and to call for greater unity among African Americans in the fight for equality.

Both *The Bondman's Narrative* and *The Marrow of Tradition* engage with the theme of gender, exploring how the experience of racism is shaped by the intersection of race and gender. Black women in both novels face unique forms of oppression that differ from those experienced by Black men, as they are subjected to both racial and gender-based discrimination. In *The Bondman's Narrative*, Hannah Crafts highlights the specific challenges faced by female slaves, who were often subjected to sexual violence and exploitation in addition to the physical and psychological abuse experienced by individual slaves. Riah, as a Black woman, must navigate the dual oppressions of slavery and patriarchy. The novel exposes the vulnerability female slaves to the sexual predation of their white male owners, a form of violence that was both pervasive and rarely discussed in mainstream antebellum literature[11], [15].

Crafts portrays Riah as a strong and resilient character who resists not only the institution of slavery but also the gendered violence that is intrinsic to it. Her journey is one of both physical survival and emotional endurance, as she struggles to maintain her dignity in a world that seeks to strip her of it. The novel's focus on the experiences of Black women adds an important layer to its critique of slavery, revealing the intersectional nature of the oppression faced by African American women in the antebellum South.

Charles Chesnutt also addresses the intersection of race and gender in *The Marrow of Tradition*, though his focus is more on the public and political roles of African American women in the post-Reconstruction era. Through characters like Janet Miller, the wife of Dr. Miller, Chesnutt explores how Black women

navigate a society that devalues both their race and their gender. Janet's experience as a mixed-race woman further complicates her identity, as she is caught between the worlds of Black and white society, accepted fully by neither.

Chesnutt uses Janet's character to critique the social norms that dictate what is acceptable for women of different races. While Janet is well-educated and married to a respected professional, she is still subject to the same racist attitudes that pervade Southern society. Her struggles to assert her place within this world reflect the broader difficulties faced by Black women who sought to carve out spaces for themselves in a patriarchal and racist society.

5. THE ENDURING LEGACY OF SLAVERY AND RACISM TODAY

The themes explored in *The Bondman's Narrative* and *The Marrow of Tradition* remain profoundly relevant in contemporary society. Both novels offer insights into the systemic nature of racism and the ways in which historical injustices continue to shape modern social dynamics. The legacy of slavery, as depicted in *The Bondman's Narrative*, and the persistence of racial hierarchies, as portrayed in *The Marrow of Tradition*, provide a framework for understanding ongoing struggles for racial justice in the 21st century

One of the most pressing contemporary issues that can be linked to the themes of these novels is the phenomenon of mass incarceration. The criminal justice system in the United States disproportionately targets African Americans, with Black individuals being incarcerated at much higher rates than their white counterparts[18]. Scholars such as Michelle Alexander, in her book *The New Jim Crow*, argued that mass incarceration serves as a continuation of the racial control mechanisms that were established during slavery and reinforced during the Jim Crow era [18], [19], [20]. The economic exploitation of Black labor, highlighted in both novels, finds a modern parallel in the exploitation of incarcerated individuals who are often forced to work for little to no pay.

The legacy of slavery and the systemic racial control mechanisms that followed its abolition are reflected in the modern phenomenon of mass incarceration, a system that disproportionately impacts African Americans and other marginalized groups. In *The Bondman's Narrative*, Crafts exposes the economic and social exploitation of individual slaves, while Chesnutt's *The Marrow of Tradition* critiques the persistence of racial hierarchies in the post-slavery South [18]. These themes find resonance in contemporary discussions about the ways in which mass incarceration perpetuates racial inequalities.

The criminal justice system, particularly in the United States, continues to serve as a means of controlling African American populations through the disproportionate incarceration of Black men and women. This practice can be seen as an extension of the racial control mechanisms that were initially rooted in slavery and continued through Jim Crow laws. Scholar Michelle Alexander, in her seminal work *The New Jim Crow*:

Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness, argues that the mass incarceration of African Americans functions as a modern-day caste system, one that strips Black individuals of their civil rights much like the old systems of slavery and segregation [12].

Alexander points to the War on Drugs as a key factor in the rise of mass incarceration, which disproportionately targets Black and Brown communities. The criminalization of drug offenses has led to the over-policing of these communities, resulting in the incarceration of millions of African Americans, many of whom are subjected to harsh sentences for non-violent crimes. Much like the economic exploitation of slaves described in *The Bondman's Narrative*, people who are incarcerated today are often forced to work for little to no pay, reinforcing the idea that racial control and economic exploitation are intertwined [11].

The connection between mass incarceration and historical racial control mechanisms highlights the ongoing relevance of the themes explored in *The Bondman's Narrative* and *The Marrow of Tradition*. Both novels emphasize the systemic nature of racial oppression, and their critiques of the social structures that uphold white supremacy continue to inform contemporary discussions about justice and equality.

In both *The Bondman's Narrative* and *The Marrow of Tradition*, the authors critique the systems of racial oppression that shape the lives of African Americans. Crafts highlights the brutality of slavery and the dehumanization of Black individuals, while Chesnutt exposes the racial hierarchies that persist in the post-slavery South. These critiques remain relevant in today's discussions about systemic racism, which continues to shape the lives of African Americans in numerous ways [12].

Systemic racism refers to the policies and practices that are embedded within institutions, which disproportionately disadvantage racial minorities. In the contemporary United States, systemic racism is evident in a variety of arenas, including housing, education, employment, healthcare, and law enforcement [21]. The racial wealth gap, for instance, is a direct result of historical policies such as redlining, segregation, and discriminatory lending practices, all of which prevented African Americans from accumulating wealth and building intergenerational economic stability. This economic marginalization, rooted in the legacy of slavery, is a theme that both novels address, particularly in their depictions of the economic exploitation of African Americans.

In addition to economic inequalities, systemic racism is evident in the disproportionate rates of police violence against African Americans. The Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement, which emerged in response to the killings of unarmed Black individuals by police officers, draws attention to the ways in which African Americans are targeted by law enforcement [22]. This modern form of racial violence echoes the mob violence depicted in *The Marrow of Tradition*, where the white supremacist forces seek to maintain control over African Americans through terror and intimidation [21]. Chesnutt's depiction of the Wilmington Massacre parallels modern-day instances of racial violence,

illustrating how deeply embedded white supremacy remains in American society [23].

The BLM movement, like the characters in Chesnutt's novel, represents a form of resistance to these oppressive systems. By drawing attention to the ongoing legacy of racial violence and inequality, BLM activists seek to challenge the systemic racism that continues to shape the lives of African Americans, much as the characters in *The Marrow of Tradition* resist the racial hierarchies that define their world.

The significance of opposing injustice is emphasized in both *The Bondman's Narrative* and *The Marrow of Tradition*; this issue is still very pertinent in light of contemporary social justice initiatives. The structural racism and socioeconomic injustices that disproportionately impact African Americans are still being challenged in the twenty-first century by groups like Black Lives Matter, the Movement for Black Lives, and other civil rights organizations.

Black resistance to white supremacy has a long history, dating back to the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s and the abolitionist movements of the 19th century [24]. This is especially true of the BLM movement. Characters like Riah and Dr. Miller in *The Bondman's Narrative* and *The Marrow of Tradition* both exhibit this tradition of resistance by refusing to submit to the social systems that aim to oppress them. These personalities exemplify the spirit of resistance that has been essential to African American history through their actions of defiance, whether they be moral, intellectual, or physical.

Riah's determination to escape slavery in *The Bondman's Narrative* shows the efforts of modern activists to escape the metaphorical chains of systemic racism. Her physical and emotional resistance to the dehumanizing institution of slavery highlights the importance of agency in the fight for freedom. Similarly, Dr. Miller's professional success in *The Marrow of Tradition* represents a form of resistance against the racial hierarchies that attempt to limit his potential. Both characters, like modern activists, refuse to be defined by the oppressive systems that seek to control them.

Another theme explored in the two novels is the intersection of race and gender. Black women, in particular, have historically been at the forefront of resistance efforts, both during slavery and in the modern era. The Black Lives Matter movement, for example, was co-founded by three Black women; Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi, who sought to highlight the ways in which Black women and LGBTQ+ individuals are often overlooked in discussions about racial violence [24]. In *The Bondman's Narrative*, Crafts emphasizes the unique forms of oppression that Black women face under slavery, particularly the threat of sexual violence and exploitation. This intersectional analysis, which recognizes the ways in which race and gender interact to create distinct experiences of oppression, is reflected in modern feminist movements, particularly Black feminism [15], [16]. The Combahee River Collective, a Black feminist organization formed in the 1970s, articulated the idea that the liberation of all oppressed . This focus on the intersection of

race and gender echoes the concerns raised in *The Bondman's Narrative* and *The Marrow of Tradition*, where Black women must navigate both racial and gender-based forms of oppression.

6. CONCLUSION

The themes explored in *The Bondman's Narrative* and *The Marrow of Tradition* slavery, racism, economic exploitation, resistance, and gender, remain continues to remain relevant to contemporary discussions about racial justice and equality. Both novels offer a critical lens through which we can examine the historical roots of systemic racism and the ways in which these structures continue to shape modern society. From the economic exploitation of slave labor to the persistence of racial hierarchies after emancipation, Crafts and Chesnutt provide a blueprint for understanding the ongoing struggle for racial equality in the United States.

The characters in these novels, particularly Riah and Dr. Miller, serve as symbols of resistance against the dehumanizing forces of slavery and racism. Their determination to assert their humanity in the face of overwhelming oppression parallels the efforts of modern activists who continue to fight for justice in a society that remains deeply divided along racial lines. By drawing connections between these historical texts and contemporary social justice movements, this research highlights the enduring legacy of systemic racism and the importance of literature as a tool for advancing the cause of equality.

Both *The Bondman's Narrative* and *The Marrow of Tradition* showed the need for collective resistance to stop white supremacy that continue to impact African Americans today. As society confronts the ongoing legacies of slavery, segregation, and discrimination, the insights provided by Crafts and Chesnutt remain invaluable for understanding the complexities of race in America. Through their works, these authors challenge readers to confront the injustices of the past and work toward a more just and equitable future.

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